SECTION 1 : The Village in Maltese Rural Society.

121 369 Despite the small size of the Maltese Islands, the physical units in which the people live - the towns and villages (Map 1) - possess diverse characteristics. Sometimes administrative, sometimes morphological (i.e. pertaining to the physical arrangement of functional parts), these provide important evidence of the social and economic nature of society. The present report is concerned with rural society and with farming in the Islands where it is clear that the 'village' both reflects and shapes the character of the farmer. The historical evolution of the settlements cannot be examined here but a brief mention must be made of some important historical facts.

175 369 [361] [396] During their rule in Malta, from 1530 to 1798, the Knights of St. John built Valletta (after 1575) and founded an associated dockyard and surrounding towns. These creations have since expanded and merged to become the nucleus of modern Urban Malta. Before 1530, urban society had existed only in the capital, Notabile (Mdina)[1], and in a few large town-villages, none of which lay on the coast or adjoined the Grand Harbour. Nearly the whole of Malta and Gozo had been previously rural in that the population depended [241] [464] on a subsistence, peasant agriculture, with alternative employment existing only in the larger settlements or in the little harbour at the Borgo (Cospicua). Under the Knights, Valletta on the coast succeeded Notabile in the centre of the Island as capital; and the large town-villages (by pre-1530 standards) of Żebbuġ, Siġġiewi, Żejtun, and Żurrieq declined in relative importance.

[161] [396] [434] [712] [707] Little change otherwise occurred until the century and a half of British rule during which the Valletta nucleus and associated townships became dominant and the increase in the population accelerated[2]. The national economy became overwhelmingly dependent on the naval and commercial dockyards in the first place and, later, on the army and air-force bases[3]. Thus the old rural settlements became relatively if not absolutely of little importance.

RURAL SOCIETY

369 241 433 It is reasonable to talk of the farming communities as being synonomous with 'rural' settlements in Malta but the position demands more precise definition. Certainly the largest part of the Maltese rural-dwelling population has been based on agriculture - whether the peasant subsistence of the past or the commercial farming of today. Peasant subsistence farming in small-holding units, supplying almost all the needs of the family working the farm, is a type of farming in which money plays little or no part. It has faded very rapidly

175 288 464 century but went into decline early in the nineteenth, particularly after the Spanish Government prohibited all imports of yarn (1800). But the industry was slow to die and is today undergoing something of a re-birth under a protective monopoly[5]. Cotton provided, during the nineteenth century, much employment, particularly for women who, in 1861, amounted to 96% of all cotton workers (B/167 - 1861). The small male labour force was mainly engaged in the beating and dyeing departments of the industry. This industry moreover, was centred in the villages and was essentially a home craft, so that the worker in cotton was never very far removed from home or farm, and field work was an alternative when cotton production declined. This decline accelerated towards the close of the nineteenth century but was not spread at an even rate over the whole of the rural area of the Islands. The total decline was due to external economic factors but, within the Islands themselves, the industry survived longest in its traditional 'core area' of Rabat and Żebbuġ. "The cotton industry persisted where the skills were greatest - where it now exists as a craft industry" (B/381).

175 178 241 369 464 [288] [396] [504] However the harbour areas and the dockyard were providing work and opportunity on an increasing scale towards the end of the nineteenth century and during the first quarter of this[6]. "The population nearest the harbour profited first, and there was a spreading outwards, as more and more of the Island sought work in the port. As the attraction of the harbour area spread, so interest in the declining cotton industry decreased". (B/381) A new alternative was thus appearing and one very different in that it meant a greater break with home, farm and village than had been the case with cotton. Agriculture itself came to feel the impact of the alternatives. "Gradually the whole Island became drawn into the economic sphere of the harbour area, and the population of the rural area became less and less dependent on agriculture for its livelihood" (B/381). This is a key factor in 178 241 369 an understanding of rural Malta and Gozo today. The second, 241 433 considered later in more detail, is the social change which has been brought about by the emancipation of the villager through direct and indirect education and contact with the people and ideas of the world outside. Together these two forces, the one an extension and magnification of what had happened before on a temporary basis and the other a consequence of the trend towards social enlightenment which has been a widespread feature of the twentieth-century world, have given the farmer an escape. On the economic level he has the new range of employment opportunities indicated, while his newly acquired literacy and education is making it

178 possible for the young countryman to follow his economic
241 shift from country to town with a social transplanting out
369 of the close-knit community of the rural village to the
241 cosmopolitan levels of life in the towns.

433 Along with the increase of employment in the dockyard
178 and harbour there has been a relative decline in agriculture
464 in that an increase in the total numbers of the farming
396 community was accompanied by a shrinking of the agricultural
433 sector within the total gainfully occupied population of the
504 Islands. The Dockyard has grown to become the largest single
369 concern and, in March 1957[7], gave employment to 12,572 Maltese workers (plus a further 417 United Kingdom nationals). The percentage of Dockyard employees in individual districts may be taken as a second possible criterion of 'rurality'. Appendix 2.A, showing Dockyard workers in March, 1957, expressed as a percentage of the employed population, reveals the heaviest concentration round the yards themselves (the Three Cities) and in the Żejtun, Żabbar, Pawla and Kalkara areas of south-eastern Malta. The whole of Gozo supplied only twenty-five workers at that time - this being the same figure as for Santa Vennera, near Hamrun. Nevertheless it is significant that no part of Malta is unrepresented in the Dockyard (Map 4).

464 The workers listed in Appendix 2.A are only a part of
36 those employed in the harbour area and the towns and it is to this group that one refers when speaking of the 'draw' of the harbour area and its associated manufacturing and service industries. These include transport of various kinds, shops, cafés and bars, workshops, offices and all manner of public utilities and services.

361 It is clear that in a definition of 'rurality' the
369 occupational structure, whether considered from a farming or
162 dockyard point of view, is not the sole criterion though the most convenient. One might take, for example, the extent to which each census district is built-over. The 1957 census distinguishes 'township' areas within each district (Appendix 3). The township-dwelling population accounts, as one would expect, for nearly 100% of the total in the Urban zone, but even in the rural districts most people are seen to live within the villages rather than in isolated farmsteads. In terms of area on the other hand the contrast between urban and rural zones is marked. In all three rural zones only five districts show a built-up township area accounting for more than 10% of the total. Richardson considers this nucleated-dispersed aspect of settlement distribution for 1948 and 1931 and notes significant changes in the pattern (B/561).

APPENDIX 2 B : The Malta Dockyard - Dates of major Extensions prior to 1910.

175
396

Admiralty House, Vittoriosa	Probably built	1670-1680
Superintendent Victualling Yard House..	" "	1730
Captain Attendant's House	Built	1730
Admiralty House, Valletta	Re-built	1781-1783
Deputy Surgeon General's House, Bighi	Altered	1832
Officers' Residences	"	1832
Deputy Surgeon General's Office	Built	1832
Sea Baths, Bighi (extended in 1871, 1877, 1879 and 1886)	"	1832
Dockyard in Galley Creek	Mainly built	1840-1850
Corradino Tank, No. 1	Built	1841
Naval Bakery	"	1844
Clock Tower	"	1844
Canine Tunnel	"	1845
Dockyard Terrace, Senglea	"	1846
No. 1 Dock (Outer)	"	1847
Bakery Tanks	"	1847-1848
Officers' Mess, Sheer Bastion	Altered	1848
Buildings round No. 1 Dock	Built	1848
Admiralty Bridge (Margherita)	"	1848
Master Miller, Baker Engineer's House	"	1848
Police Quarters	"	1848
(Late) Torpedo Store	"	1848
Main Gate	"	1849
Wharf by Sheer Bastion and Main Gate	"	1850
Foreman's Residence	"	1851
St. Helena Tank	"	1852
Slip in front of Margherita Arches	"	1852
St. Teresa Tunnel	"	1855
St. Lorenzo Tunnel	"	1858
Corradino Tank No.2	"	1861
No.1 Dock (Inner)	"	1863
Officers' Mess, Bighi	"	1865
Short Tunnel from Dockyard to French Creek	"	1866
Church Tunnel " " " " "	"	1869
Marsa Coal Stores, various	"	1871
No.3 Dock (Somerset)	"	1871
Hydraulic Dock	"	1882
Dockyard Chapel, over Tunnel	"	1884
Pumping House, No. 3 Dock	"	1884
Torpedo Depot, Sliema	"	1892
North Gate	"	1892
No. 2 Dock (Hamilton)	"	1894
South Gate	Re-built	1901
Scheme for increased accommodation for H.M. Ships	Approved	1901
Works Department Office	Built	1906
New Docks	"	1906
Burmola Gate	"	1906
Ghaja Dwieli Gate	Re-built	1907
Corradino Gate	Built	1907
Ricasoli Breakwater	"	1909
St. Elmo Breakwater	"	1909

NOTE Information from R/488, Appendix XI.